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Inaugural Address

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

By R. V. VASSAR-SMITH, *President.*

Delivered at Gloucester, July 16th, 1888.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

THE first meeting of this Society was held in this city 12 years ago, under the presidency of the late Sir William Guise, by whose death we have suffered an almost irreparable loss. That meeting was most successful, and Sir William Guise, in replying at the end of it to a vote of thanks accorded to him, spoke of the great pleasure he had received, and that he would liked to have stayed longer. Those members who were then present, and also those who have joined the Society since, I hope will be so far satisfied with the programme that has been prepared for them, that they will leave Gloucester with similar pleasant recollections, and feel that their time has not been wasted in paying a second visit to this ancient city, whose records I propose to make the subject of my address to-day. As a paper upon the archives of the Gloucester Corporation was read at the first meeting by the late Mr. K. H. Fryer, then Town Clerk, it may create some surprise that I should have chosen the same subject as the staple of my presidential address, but since Mr. Fryer's paper was written considerable progress has been made with the work of rendering more generally available the matter stored in our old Corporation records, the Corporation having engaged a reporter of the Historical MSS. Commission to arrange and calendar their archives. This important work is now all but completed, and I have therefore decided to deal with some of the results of the close inspection to which the records have been submitted, with the view of drawing the attention of Gloucestershire antiquaries to the store of information embodied in these archives. My predecessor, Mr. Fryer, has dealt in his paper with the Royal Charters of Liberties. I need not, therefore, detain you by reciting the privileges contained in these Royal Charters, but I would wish to call attention to the splendid

series of great seals which the Royal deeds have attached to them. The importance of the Gloucester collection can at once be seen by an inspection of Mr. Wyon's recently published work on the Great Seals of England. During the course of the calendaring a score or more of impressions which were not examined by Mr. Wyon have been brought to light. Next in importance to the Royal Charters should come the Rolls of the Borough Court, but these have unfortunately not been preserved. Of their existence there can be no doubt, for several of the deeds have endorsements upon them testifying that they were enrolled in the rolls in the time of so-and-so, bailiff of Gloucester, and there is an extract from them giving copies of two deeds enrolled therein. It is very unfortunate that these important records should have so entirely disappeared, for similar rolls in other ancient boroughs give most interesting glimpses of life in mediæval times. Another regrettable loss is that of the early accounts of the chamberlain or stewards of the town, and we have also to deplore the loss of the whole of the records of the court leet. These are classes of records from which matters of popular interest might have been derived, and the fact that these records have not been preserved, has, I am afraid, robbed my paper of any interest it might have possessed for those who are not professed antiquaries. But if the Gloucester collection is weak in these departments, it is exceptionally strong in a branch that is more useful to local historians than merely curious cases in the borough courts would be. We have a truly grand collection of very early deeds. The importance of this collection may be readily brought out by a contrast with those preserved in other ancient borough records. The Nottingham Corporation possess only 13 deeds older than the year 1300, at Leicester there is one small packet of deeds of this period, at Southampton 14 deeds, and the King's Lynn Corporation possess 12. But at Gloucester we have no less than 571 deeds of this time, and of that number 81 belong to the first quarter of the 13th century, some are even earlier, 159 to the second quarter, and 232 to the third quarter. These early deeds relate to lands at Apperley, Badgeworth, Barnwood, Brimpsfield, Cleeve, Cowley, Elmbridge, Elmore, Hardwicke, Hasfield, Hatherley, Hucclecote,

Longford, Minsterworth, Newnham, Swindon, Uley, Witcombe, Woodmancote and Wootton. Incidentally they throw great light upon local and personal names, and they contain scores of field names. A large proportion of them relate to Gloucester, and they preserve the early forms of the street-names, &c., in the town. Of the value of these deeds to genealogists I need not here speak, for they will readily perceive the importance of this collection. It is to be regretted that they have remained for so long a time unused, and practically unavailable for want of arrangement. This obstacle to their use has now been removed, and it only remains to print the voluminous calendar of these records to render their contents available for local historians, genealogists and philologists. One of these deeds dating from about 1270, contains a very irregular way of making a good assurance of title. In it Agnes Cooperich sets out that she has granted to Thomas of Norfolk an annual rent of four shillings arising from land next the door of the Bothall, as contained in her charter, and by the present deed she witnesses that she had voluntarily taken an oath, submitting herself to the jurisdiction and correction of the Bishop of Worcester or the Archdeacon of Gloucester, so that either of them can, if they be required so to do, suspend or excommunicate her, or cause her to be beaten through the middle of Gloucester market, or inflict any other punishment upon her, without process of judgment, if she should do anything to challenge the title of the said Thomas to the rent. There are also some 500 or 600 later deeds. These, although not so valuable as the older ones, nevertheless contain much interesting matter. From one of them dated August 5th, 1347, we learn that the Prior of the Hospital of St. Bartholomew's, the Rector of the Church of St. Nicholas, granted permission to the parishioners to build upon a piece of land between the wide door and wall of the church on the north, and the King's highway on the south, extending in length from the stone wall at the chapel of St. Mary in the same church on the east, to the stonework of the belfry of the said church in the west, on condition that all rent or profit arising from the said building should be applied to the repair of the church. This building would appear to be the south aisle of the church, which is such a singular

feature in the structure ; but another deed dated 1347 is a grant from the Prior of St. Bartholomew to the White Friars at Gloucester of an aqueduct from the spring called "Goswhitewell, to be brought by means of a lead pipe under the land of the Hide (now part of Wootton). It is rather interesting to read of lead pipes at so early a date, but this is not the only case in Gloucester records, for there was at this time a lead pipe bringing water from Robin Hood's Hill to the Abbey of St. Peter and to the Grey Friars. But I will not dwell further upon this subject, as it will form part of Mr. Sylvester Davies's paper on the Grey Friars. From the lengthy will of Richard Manchester, a Gloucester burgess, dated in 1454, we learn that he was a collector, and no doubt a reader, of books at a time when books were exceedingly scarce and dear. He bequeaths a book, that formerly belonged to John Trewpenny, to the Friars Minor for their common use, and to William Eckington a book in Latin, on arithmetic, and, more interesting still, he leaves his Latin book called the "Marrow of Grammar" (*Medulla Grammaticæ*) to remain in a chest in the church of St. Mary in the South, under the care of the chaplains and wardens of the chantry of St. Mary there ; and another book of the miracles of St. Jerome, described as being bound by iron chains to the stall in which he used to sit in the same church, to be kept there under the care of the wardens of the church, for the increase of virtue of those perusing the same book. This looks like the foreshadowing of a free library. He leaves his next best book to one Richard Spilsbury, junior, and directs that his executors are to dispose of his other books by way of alms to such persons as shall seem most worthy. This will makes Richard Manchester an interesting figure in our ancient history. Before leaving these deeds I should mention that we are indebted to them for the preservation of the names of the bailiffs of the borough for more than two centuries. Thanks to the great number of 13th century deeds, we possess the name of almost every bailiff of that period. Most boroughs are fortunate if they can obtain the names of five or six of the officers of that time. An interesting and curious member of the collection is a book of ordinances, &c., beginning in 1487. It is still enclosed in

the original binding, but the oak boards forming the sides are much worm-eaten. The contents of this book are most diverse. There is an interesting account of the reception and entertainment of King Henry VIII. and Queen Anne Boleyn, who arrived here from Tewkesbury on Saturday, July 31st, 1535. They were met by the mayor, alderman and sheriffs, in scarlet gowns, and a hundred other burgesses, all on horseback, at the boundary of the liberties, beyond Brickhampton, the mayor riding up to the King saying: "Thanks be to God of your Grace's health and prosperity, which God long continue." After which the mayor kissed the town mace that he held in his hand, and delivered it with a bow to the King, intimating in a brief speech that he hereby surrendered the franchises of the borough to his Majesty, that all the burgesses were loyal to their King and ready to do his commands. The King received the mace, but immediately delivered it back to the mayor, thereby confirming the liberties of the borough. At the White Friars, without the North Gate, the procession was met by the clergy of the town, in full vestments, with the Lord Suffragan¹ in his mitre. The Royal party were then escorted to the abbey, where they were received by the Abbot and his brethren, the King and Queen going up at once to the High Altar, preceded by the mayor bearing one of the town maces. Their Majesties lodged at the abbey. No account is given of the proceedings on the Sunday, but on Monday, about ten in the morning, they went hunting towards Painswick, the mayor and his brethren presenting them before they started with ten fat oxen of the value of £20, "for the which his Grace gave unto them loving thanks." On their return they were met by fifteen torch bearers, who escorted them to the abbey, for which attention the Queen gave them "four angelet nobles." On the Tuesday morning, the mayor and his brethren presented the Queen, who was riding towards Cubberly, with a purse of gold containing twenty gold royals. The same day was spent by the King in hunting at Miserden. The account then records their departure on the Saturday, being escorted as far as

¹ This was Andrew Whitmay, Bishop of Chrysolopolis, Suffragan of Worcester, 1526-1535. He is called Prior of St. Bartholomew's Hospital of Gloucester in deeds dated 1517 and 1534 in the Corporation Archives.

Quedgeley by the mayor and his brethren, and a number of the burgesses. The book also contains an account of the reception of Princess Mary, the daughter of Henry VIII. and Katharine of Aragon, who visited Gloucester on September 12th, 1525. She is described as the "Princess of England," and was at that time the only legitimate child of Henry VIII. She was then in her tenth year. We read that the mayor, aldermen, and sheriffs, in scarlet, and hundred burgesses rode to Quedgeley Green, and there awaited the Princess's arrival, "and then made their obeisance on horseback, showing one of the maces of the town." The mayor's brethren then set forth for the town, riding two and two, the sergeants at mace leading the way, knights, esquires, and gentlemen in the middle, and the mayor immediately in front of the Princess, "Her Grace riding with the Serjeant at Arms bare-headed, and one of the Serjeant's maces in his hand." Next followed the ladies and gentlewomen of the Princess's train, on horseback, and then her servants in a livery, the rear of the procession being brought up by other burgesses riding two and two. At the town end, the clergy with copes, crosses, carpets, and cushions, awaited their Highnesses, who "lovingly then kissed the cross on horseback." Then the procession proceeded through the town to the abbey gates, where the abbot and his brethren awaited them in the abbey porch. Here Mary alighted from her horse and kissed the cross, then proceeded to the high altar, where she offered a piece of gold. The mayor and his brethren, in scarlet robes, preceded her to the altar, and also to her lodgings. In accordance with the custom of the time the mayor and his brethren presented to her "two fat oxen of the best that might be gotten" and ten fat wethers. The contents of this valuable book also comprise regulations made by the Town Council for trades, markets, &c., and various other orders relating to town business. There is also a list of the deaths, resignations, or deprivation of the aldermen from 1505 to 1647, which is of value as giving the dates of death of the aldermen. There are also lists of the soldiers raised in the city at different times, and copies of the letters and commissions connected with these levies. The accounts of arming and dispatching these levies are also sometimes given. These

lists preserve the names of twenty-five men of Gloucester who formed part of the English expedition to the south of France in 1512, an expedition that ended in complete failure and a mutiny of the troops. There are also the names of the forty men called out for Mary's French war in the autumn of 1557; the men raised for the relief of Calais, who left Gloucester for Cirencester on February 8th, 1558, and who went as far as the Isle of Wight at the city's expense. The contingent consisted of ten archers and ten pikemen, and they were accompanied by twenty-five men from the county of the city. In 1558 there is a list of twenty-five archers, thirty pikemen, and sixty-five billmen in Gloucester who are returned as fit to serve in war. Then we have the names of the twenty-five men from Gloucester who assisted Queen Mary against the Duke of Northumberland, who was maintaining the right of Lady Jane Grey to the Crown. Finally, there are twenty-four names of the Gloucester soldiers "that went to Ampthill when the insurrection was out in the North Country," *i.e.* they were embodied to resist the Pilgrimage of Grace. There is another book, commencing in 1622, that gives copies of all letters received connected with the mustering of the trained bands, the impressing of the trained bands, the impressing of soldiers, &c., with lists of the men. It has also a copy of the Proclamation of Charles I. as King. There are copies of commissions, &c., relating to the levying of a company of volunteers to form part of the Marquis of Hamilton's force of volunteers for the assistance of Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden. This was in 1631. In Gloucester sixteen volunteers were found, and the names of the men are preserved. Another book of the same description contains a correspondence relative to the musters in the city on the eve of the civil wars. On March 15th, 1640, the Marquis of Northampton was commissioned to raise 1500 men in Gloucestershire and 500 men in Warwickshire. There is a copy of the instructions sent out with this commission. In raising the men he was to take care that there was a good choice made of the men out of the trained bands. For drilling these levies the arms of the trained bands were to be borrowed, but they were to be restored when the men marched

away from the county. The men were to join the Earl of Northumberland at Newcastle on May 10th. Their pay was to be 8d. a day, which was to be paid by the county until they joined the King's army. On the 26th March the Privy Council commanded Lord Northampton to provide sixty strong horses and twenty carters from Warwickshire and fifty horses and seventeen carters from Gloucestershire, for the artillery train, to be at Newcastle by June 15th. On June 16th, the mayor wrote to Lord Northampton, that he and his brethren had enlisted 150 men and had caused them to be drilled, and explaining that they could not despatch the men to the general rendezvous because they had been unable to raise the necessary funds. The names of persons who neglected or refused to pay their assessment were enclosed with this letter. The mayor complained of the number of men that the city and the county of the city had to provide, and requested that the number might be reduced to 100, but his request was unavailing. A list of 130 men who were provided by the city is given. These levies had only just been dispatched when orders came to hold the trained band in readiness to march at short notice to repel the Scotch army. On August 27th, the notice was limited to twenty-four hours. Instructions were also given to have in readiness a sufficient body of pioneers, carts and horses, spades, shovels, pickaxes, &c., "and all other tools necessary for the making of works for defence in those perilous times," and to have the county powder magazine well stored with powder, shot and match, and the beacons were to be made ready and watched. After this there is a leap to 1643, when there is a copy of a letter from Thomas Pury and others, dated Nov. 30th, 1643, addressed to the mayor and aldermen of Gloucester, relating to the provision of money for the garrison of Gloucester. The next levy is that of twenty soldiers to form part of 500 men to be sent to Major General Skippon at Bristol, for garrisoning Bristol and Bath. This order came from the committee of both kingdoms, and is dated February 16th, 1645-6. Next we have the names of the horsemen raised by the city in 1651 to form part of the standing army of 4000 cavalry authorised by parliament. In this year also thirty men were impressed in the city to recruit the army in

Ireland ; one of whom, named William Hooke, "fled away from his quarters. Then there is a letter from the mayor and his brethren to the Speaker of the House, informing him that they have repaired the fortifications of the town, and raised in two days nearly seven hundred soldiers for the defence of the town against Prince Charles and his army. Cromwell's victory at Worcester shortly afterwards relieved the city of the fear of another seige. There are also many other interesting letters and memoranda connected with these disturbed days, but the time at my disposal will not allow me to dwell upon them. The book contains a curious account of the ceremony of proclaiming Cromwell Lord Protector, upon his Parliamentary appointment, in Gloucester. A scaffold was erected at the north end of the Market House, near the High Cross, about 4 feet high, draped with red cloth, upon which the mayor, aldermen and council stood. The procession met at the Cathedral at noon on July 11th, 1657, and went to the scaffold accompanied by the wardens of the trading companies, the constables a dozen halberdiers, and the waits. After the proclamation, the mayor and his company proceeded to the Tolsey, when cakes and wine were provided, the trumpeters meanwhile playing upon the leads of the Tolsey and the Cross, running claret wine at two cocks. At night bonfires were lit throughout the city and bells rang. Shortly after this date, on December 2nd, 1657, Cromwell wrote to the common council at Gloucester, that he had information that the cavaliers were planning a surprise at Gloucester, and he accordingly authorised the Council to raise the militia, and promised to send down a troop of horse. The Council replied on the 9th, acknowledging the receipt of this letter, and stated that they had appointed four captains for the above purpose, and pointed out that they had only 150 muskets and no pikes, because their arms had been seized and sent to Chepstow Castle. This refers to the time of the dismantling of the garrison. In the following March, Cromwell wrote to say that he had information of an intended Royalist invasion, the Royalists having twenty-two ships of war ready at Ostende. Hereupon the militia were again embodied at Gloucester. On March 15th, 1657-8, the Mayor and Council write to

say that in addition to the four companies of militia, there are many citizens who are willing to provide and bear their own arms for the defence of the city, and they request that Alderman Robert Tyther may be commissioned as the captain of these volunteers. We have next the letter of Henry Lawrence, President of the Council announcing the death of Oliver Cromwell, followed by a copy of the proclamation of his son Richard, as Protector, issued by the Mayor and magistrates of the city. This brings the warlike records of these troubled days to an end. At a council held March 26th, 1658, the stewards were authorised to lay out £5 in the purchase of chains for the books in the library in the college, and twelve volumes of Aldrovandi, then in the library, were purchased for £25 from Thomas Pury. This probably refers to the Encyclopædia of Natural History written by Aldrovandi. The remainder of the records are chiefly minutes of the proceedings of the Corporation, which, perhaps, do not come within the scope of this Society, but they will be fully set out in the report of the Historical MSS. Commission.
